

## Session #5

**Fringe Land Use Guide and Street Plan**  
Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments  
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### ABSTRACT

The Fringe Land Use Guide and Transportation Plan has been developed over the past two years by the F-M Metropolitan [Council of Governments](#). One of the primary purposes of the project was to extend arterial and collector street planning beyond city limits, and even beyond the two mile extraterritorial area, to allow Cass County to more effectively plan for the future urban characteristics of the area. Another effort of the study was to identify and resolve issues of incompatible land uses in the areas where Fargo, North Dakota and West Fargo, North Dakota are growing together. The study included portions of Cass County, to address fringe areas outside the city limits where a significant amount of rural development is occurring. This study is also part of a larger effort to help policy makers understand that there is a strong relationship between [transportation and land use planning](#).

The combined population of Fargo and West Fargo, North Dakota is approximately 97,000. There is no physical separation between the two communities, such as a river or highway, so in many areas the two cities are growing together and only a city limit line separates them. This has caused problems between the two communities related to the approval of incompatible land uses across city limit lines and varying philosophies/policies regarding the function and location of arterial and collector streets. Further complicating these issues is the fact that the extraterritorial area of the two cities overlap, and there is some competition for new growth areas.

#### **Techniques which could be applied in other Metropolitan Areas**

- **Formulation of recommendations for future ROW acquisition and [access management](#) along corridors identified as future arterial roadways** - Adoption of the study provides a guideline for the County and townships with regard to ROW requirements and limited access policies that should be implemented, even if they are decades in advance of urban development in the area.
- **Formation of a review process for future land use and transportation changes in the area defined as the “fringe area”** - Planners from all three jurisdictions and the MPO will convene to discuss the effects of proposed land use or roadway changes in the fringe areas, where they have the greatest potential to effect the other two jurisdictions. Input from the group will be provided to the Planning Commission considering the

proposed change. A process for this was set up in the study.

- **Incorporated land use and transportation plans of all three jurisdictions onto a single map** - The map then became a tool for review and discussion of incompatible land use combinations and transportation planning issues. As a result of the review process described above, the map will be updated and refined on a regular basis.
- **Development of a map showing likely first and second tier of future urban development** -Projected annual acreage of urbanization was calculated, resulting in “moderate” and “high” development scenarios for the metropolitan area. The results will be used to guide the cities during decisions regarding infrastructure expansion, etc. and also provide good public information.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of the Fringe Land Use Guide and Transportation Plan was to help local governments work together to plan for transportation facilities in their growth areas. In addition, it was to assist local governments to work together to plan compatible land uses in their growth areas. The intent was to focus on land use compatibility with future transportation facilities and land use compatibility with adjacent land uses.

The project was initiated by two elected officials who believed that more cooperation with regard to land use and transportation planning between the three neighboring jurisdictions of Fargo, West Fargo, and Cass County would be beneficial. Most of the local planning staff agreed, but the project was not well defined.

In one or two of the participating jurisdictions, staff and/or elected officials viewed the project as an attempt to usurp local approval authority for development proposals. They seemed to fear that the project would give adjacent jurisdictions too much authority in what was developed in their own jurisdiction.

One of the interesting aspects of the project is that it was strongly supported by the Cass County planning and engineering staff. These individuals had concern over land use, right-of-way, and access decisions that would be incompatible in a future urban situation.

## **Evolution of Project Goals: One Product Leads to the Desire for another Product**

The study review committee for the project was made up of planning staff from each of the three local jurisdictions participating in the project. Engineering staff was consulted throughout the project. At various points throughout the project, the Study Review Committee was expanded to include an elected official from each jurisdiction. This allowed the staff on the Committee to present our decisions about the direction of the project and the products to a small group of elected officials for early feedback. This direction often resulted in an expansion of the project goals. Some examples of how the direction of the project evolved are described below.

### ***Study Area***

The initial focus of the study was a high growth area south of Fargo and West Fargo, where the two cities were growing together and growing into the County. In addition, there is a significant amount of rural development taking place in this area. Upon consultation with the elected officials on the Study Review Committee after completing some of the initial products of the study, the study area was expanded to include all of the two mile extraterritorial zoning area of Fargo and one mile extraterritorial area of West Fargo.

### ***Land Use Planning***

Initially, the focus of the project was to compare land use plans that had already

been prepared by the Cities, for the purpose of identifying any areas where land use planning adjacent to city boundaries was incompatible with land uses in the adjacent jurisdiction. This effort was carried out by compiling the land use plans of the two jurisdictions, and placing them on a single map. Several potentially incompatible situations were identified and discussed as to how the land use plans could be changed to eliminate the incompatibility.

Since the City of Fargo did not have a comprehensive land use map that included all of their extraterritorial area and West Fargo had not updated its comprehensive plan since the mid 1980s, there was a significant amount of extraterritorial area in which no future land use planning had been carried out. In addition, Cass County does not carry out land use planning or zoning, and one of the six townships within the study area had a zoning ordinance which dealt with rural types of development.

The lack of planning in the extraterritorial area became very obvious to the elected officials when the land use plans of the two cities were plotted on one map showing city boundary lines and extraterritorial limits. At this point, the Study Review Committee decided to develop land use “guidance” for the rest of the extraterritorial area. This resulted in a cooperatively developed land use map including the entire extraterritorial area of both jurisdictions.

### ***Functional Class Designations and Right-of-Way Requirements***

With regard to transportation planning, the project was originally intended to identify future urban roadway designations in the extraterritorial area and several miles beyond. Future arterial roadways were identified up to approximately five miles beyond existing city limits. Specific locations for collector streets were only identified in the first mile or two beyond existing city limits, since those were the areas in which more detailed planning had taken place. In the remainder of the study area, it was noted that at least one continuous north/south and east/west collector street was needed per section of land, to allow drivers to get from one arterial to another without significant diversion through neighborhoods.

Upon further discussion by the Committee, it was determined that it would be important to determine the amount of right-of-way that exists in the location of the future arterial roadways. Most of these arterials will be located on existing section lines, where a minimum of 66 feet of right-of-way already exists. Some facilities have varying amounts of right-of-way, ranging from 66 feet to 150 feet. The Committee agreed to recommend that right-of-way of 150 feet be preserved for all future arterial roadways. This was based on three reasons:

- 1) a ROW of 150 feet is needed for a two lane paved rural roadway and road ditches,
- 2) a ROW of 150 would allow for a future four lane roadway with left and right turn lanes, a raised median, boulevards, a

sidewalk on one side, and a bikeway on the other side, with adequate ROW for expansion to a six lane roadway if needed, and

- 3) the public had recently responded very positively to landscaping of wide boulevards on a corridor which was recently reconstructed, and the general feedback was that future corridors should be designed similarly.

This compilation of ROW data and recommendation for [ROW preservation](#) of 150 feet went beyond the original scope of the project.

### Cooperative Review Process

In the early stages of the project, it was thought that after the two land use maps had been compiled onto one map, a series of discussions would take place to address incompatible land use combinations, or land uses that were incompatible with future arterial roadways. However, as these discussions took place, it became obvious that although the committee could formulate a recommendation for correcting these situations, the elected leaders would not find it acceptable to modify existing land use plans through the adoption of this multi-jurisdictional study. Rather, they strongly viewed land use decisions as an area on which they would act independently, and would not easily change as a result of pressure from a neighboring jurisdiction. Therefore, any changes to address incompatible land use combinations would needed to be completed later, after local consideration of the recommendations of the fringe area study.

The Committee considered what action could be taken through this study to prevent future incompatible situations. The outcome was the development of an on-going cooperative review process agreeable to all jurisdictions. This process will be described in further detail later in this paper.

### ***Map of Growth Tiers***

Initially, the Committee was asked to consider estimating the future growth rates for the purpose of developing maps which showed the extent of urban expansion in five year increments. These projections were to be based on acreage consumption data of development that occurred over the past 10 years. Completion of this task was undesirable to local staff, who encountered obstacles such as inconsistent methods of gathering acreage information, and uncertainty of the direction of development even in the next five years. Due to uncertainty of a new elementary school location and the potential for the City of Fargo to establish

incentives for development in one area of the City, local planning staff was uncomfortable with mapping a five year growth ring which was so subject to change.

Due to these concerns, this effort was dropped from the scope of the project. After consultation with the elected officials, they suggested a 20 year growth estimate based on acreage consumption data. This effort was not as subject to the decisions close-at-hand which could have greatly influenced development in the next five years, and was completed as part of the project.

## **Different Approach**

The order in which the land use and transportation elements of this study were carried out was somewhat unusual. The transportation planning aspect of the project was the most agreeable aspect of the study, and was therefore completed first. This was due to the fact that Metro COG had traditionally been responsible for transportation planning in the metropolitan area. The Transportation Plan for the metropolitan area as well as other past studies provided valuable data to begin the process of extending arterial and collector roadway planning farther into the fringes of the urban area and beyond. Local staff was comfortable allowing Metro COG to lead the coordination effort and the staff input into the transportation element of the project. This was not necessarily the case with the land use planning efforts. Therefore, filling in the extraterritorial area with land use guidance was completed after the arterial roadways had been agreed upon. This is a different approach for planners who are accustomed to preparing traffic impact studies.

## **Study Accomplishments**

Despite the difficulty in settling on a project scope, the Study Review Committee remained open to input from the elected officials throughout the project. The efforts of the Committee and the input from the policy makers yielded a study with several important products for the metropolitan area. They are listed below:

### ***Transportation***

- Cooperatively identified and agreed upon arterial roadways (most on section lines) - Continuity issues needed to be discussed and resolved in several cases;
- Cooperatively developed a plan for collector streets in the first mile of fringe area development;
- Agreed that at least one continuous collector street was needed per section; more than one in intense commercial areas or within the first mile of an interstate highway, where the dependence upon continuous collectors is more significant due to limited access onto and over/under the interstate;

- Identified existing ROW and roadway surface;
- Identified future ROW needs for fringe area arterials (150 feet) and collectors (80-100 feet plus 15 feet if a bikeway is planned);
- Identified the need for future river and interstate bridge locations;
- Familiarized elected officials with options for preserving and acquiring ROW;
- Familiarized city, county, and township officials with the benefits of access management;

### ***Land Use***

- Prepared a map that combined the planned land uses of both jurisdictions in fringe areas - The map served to show the extent of extraterritorial area where land use planning was not carried out;
- Cooperatively developed a land use “plan”, or guidance for the entire extraterritorial area, accounting for existing and future features such as arterial roadways, sewage lagoons, airports, possible leasing and development of NDSU land, floodway data, etc.
- Identified areas of potential land use incompatibility both across jurisdictional boundaries and across boundaries of the section-by-section plans within the City of Fargo’s study area;

### ***Early Steps of Growth Management***

- Identified a likely first “tier” of URBAN growth (urban versus the rural subdivisions currently allowed to occur in the area);
- Developed a combined growth rate for the two cities (250 acres per year for the past 10 years, 525 acres per year for the past two years); (see Table 1 below)

**Table 1**  
**Estimated Development within the Next 20 Years, 1997-2017**  
**Fargo/West Fargo Urbanized Area**

Time Frame for Development	20 Year Urban Development Tier			20 Year Urban Development Tier Plus Planning Tier		
	Acres Developed Inside Existing City Limits	Acres Developed Outside Existing City Limits	Total Acres	Acres Developed Inside Existing City Limits	Acres Developed Outside Existing City Limits	Total Acres
	Percent/ Acres	Percent/ Acres		Percent/ Acres	Percent/ Acres	
1-5 Years	80% / 1000 Acres	20% / 250 Acres	1250 Acres	50% / 1375 Acres	50% / 1375 Acres	2750 Acres
6-10 Years	50% / 625 Ac.	50% / 625 Ac.	1250 Acres	25% / 690 Ac.	75% / 2060 Acres	2750 Acres
11-20 Years	25% / 625 Ac.	75% / 1875 Acres	2500 Acres	10 % / 550 Acres	90% / 4950 Acres	5500 Acres
<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>45% / 2250 Acres</b>	<b>55% / 2750*</b>	<b>5000 Acres</b>	<b>24% / 2615 Acres</b>	<b>76% / 8385**</b>	<b>11000 Acres</b>

\* Equivalent to 4.3 sections of land

\*\* Equivalent to 13.1 sections of land

- Used the lower growth rate to identify a 20 year growth tier, and the higher growth rate to identify a “planning tier” to demonstrate the need to increase planning efforts in these areas; and
- Developed assumptions regarding the percentage of urban growth that would occur inside and outside existing (1997) city limits in 10 year increments.

These were the accomplishments directly related to transportation, land use, and growth management. Perhaps the most important, on-going result of the study was the development of the Cooperative Review Process. It is discussed separately in the next section of the paper.

### **Development of a Cooperative Review Process**

The most significant result of this project was the development of a Cooperative Review Process. The inclusion of this process in the recommendations of the study was also the most controversial aspect of the adoption of the project. The process was formed out of a desire to use the land use and transportation guidance developed in the study. It was also supported by staff as an opportunity to work with other local planners, and have increased opportunity to seek the input of

other professionals during the planning process. On a less positive note, it was also formed as a result of a lack of trust between jurisdictions.

The process is described below:

Proposals of any kind that involve a land use or transportation issue are checked for consistency with the land use guidance in the fringe plan. If an inconsistency is noted, the Study Review Committee is reconvened. The Study Review Committee determines if it should support the change, based on whether or not the proposal appears consistent with the land use and transportation features agreed to in the Fringe Land Use Guide and Transportation Plan. It also determines what other changes might be needed to recreate a compatible situation if the proposal is approved.

Written input is provided to the Planning Commission of the jurisdiction considering the project. This allows the Planning Commission to consider the point of view of the Committee who developed the Fringe Land Use Guide and Transportation Plan. Through this written input, the Planning Commission can consider the project from more of a “big picture” point of view, taking the joint recommendations of planners from neighboring jurisdictions into consideration.

If a change is approved which creates an unharmonious land use or transportation combination, the Study Review Committee is reconvened to revise the land use guidance or transportation planning element.

Another agreed upon feature of the process is that the land use guidance and transportation planning in the study are to be updated at least annually.

### Useful Applications in other Cities and MPOs

Several lessons were learned throughout the development of this project that could be applied in other cities and metropolitan planning organizations. They are described below.

**Allow for the evolution of project goals** - When local planners are asked to participate in a project that is not necessarily suggested by them or desired by them, patience is required to allow for the development of trust between the participants. During this time, the participants can begin to see possible benefits of carrying out a cooperative planning effort.

**Right-of-Way information for arterial and collector roadways** - In situations where ROW information is not readily available and corridor preservation efforts are extremely important to the future of the transportation system, having a compilation of existing and future ROW information can help to prevent lost opportunities for obtaining the necessary future ROW. In addition, the inclusion of future ROW needs in this data base is equally as valuable as data regarding the existing ROW.

**Concept of establishing a land use “guide” combined with a transportation planning element** - In a situation where an area is seriously lacking in land use planning, the establishment of a “guide” can serve as a first step. This step may help policy makers to become more comfortable with making future land use decisions in future growth areas rather than allowing the market to dictate future land use decisions.

**Use of Growth Rate Information** - In situations where planners and policy makers are uncomfortable guiding or estimating short term growth, starting with a long range growth estimate is a good starting point. In this case a 20 year growth tier was established. A more recent, higher growth rate from past two years was used to establish another larger ring of growth, which was identified as a “planning tier”. The establishment of the planning tier was helpful as it assists the public in understanding the purpose of future planning efforts being carried out miles from existing city boundaries.

**Cooperative Review Process** - Establishment of a review process agreed to by all participating jurisdictions does not resolve existing land use inconsistencies, but it does set the stage for more cooperative planning and review of development proposals in the future. In addition, it provides the Planning Commissions and elected officials with a broader base of input both geographically and professionally.

**Educating Rural Townships** - Through the public involvement process, property owners and elected officials were educated about how their decisions are related to future urban issues. Subdivision design, access management, results of increased traffic, and blending rural developments into urban settings were some of the subjects covered at these meetings, which were well received by property owners and township supervisors.

**Mapping Multi Jurisdictional Land Uses and Transportation Systems** - The simple step of placing the future land use plans and transportation systems of all participating jurisdictions on one map provided an invaluable tool for furthering discussion of the land use and transportation issues. In addition, it helped participants in the project to move toward the goal of viewing the study area as one metropolitan growth area, versus individual jurisdictions pushing toward independent city boundary lines.

## **Conclusion**

This project was an example of how a metropolitan planning organization can help bring about improved coordination and cooperation between jurisdictions within its study area. By consistently bringing this multi-jurisdictional Committee together to discuss the needs of the project, some of the resistance to working together was eliminated. Participation in the project also initiated discussions on several subjects that have become follow-up projects, such as a comparative study of subdivision regulations, a south side Red River bridge crossing corridor preservation study, and further efforts to establish growth management methods in the extraterritorial area.